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SUBJECT: BROOKINGS EVENT AMPLIFIES PRESIDENT'S SPEECH

KEY POINTS

-- (U) On June 4, the Brookings Doha Center hosted its most well-attended event ever for audience members to discuss the President's speech with Ambassador.

-- (U) Most attendees who spoke welcomed the speech, and many wondered if the President would have the support of the Congress and the Government of Israel for his initiatives.

-- (U) Several people voiced their concern that the President had not provided enough details on how he would implement his plan.

-- (U) Ambassador took the opportunity to reinforce the speech's key themes, and to encourage audience members to think about the speech as a "declaration of intent" from which would flow plans and programs to implement the President's vision.

-- (U) Local press coverage of the event was positive.

END KEY POINTS

[1](#)1. (U) Brookings Doha Center's Director Hady Amr moderated a town hall-style event with Ambassador at the center's headquarters on June 4 that turned out to be Brookings' most well-attended event in its two-year history in Doha. The audience featured a mix of over 100 expatriate Arabs, South Asians, Americans and others.

[1](#)2. (U) Most attendees who spoke voiced support for the speech. For example, Kareem Farhad, a Lebanese university student, said the speech "made my day, as well as the day of many other Arab youth." It would "empower moderates and spark a debate among the conservatives," he said.

[1](#)3. (U) An Arab-American who said he was in "self-imposed exile" ever since anti-Arab sentiment rose in the United States after 9/11, said, "The speech today gave me hope; I think I might go back to the United States now because I think Obama was being sincere."

[1](#)4. (U) Rasheed Ali, a Pakistani man living in Doha, felt the speech would "go down in history as being as important as JFK's Ich bin ein Berliner speech." He said he greatly appreciated the President's recognition that countries in the region had been treated as proxies by the great powers for too long.

[1](#)5. (U) While others welcomed the speech, they also questioned the President's ability to implement his vision. An American working at Georgetown University wondered, "How can Obama deal with the 'hardline' Israeli Government." A Pakistani man asked if the "hard issues outlined in the speech could really be tackled." An American woman wondered if the President could convince the U.S. Congress to support his approach to the Israeli Government.

[1](#)6. (U) Dr. Zakariya Matar, an expatriate Lebanese, listed all the topics that he thought the President had missed, including piracy, the Swat Valley, Syria, Darfur, corruption, and human rights in Egypt.

[1](#)7. (U) A Syrian expatriate engineer praised the President's charisma and noted that he presented a stark difference from President Bush's style, but asked why he had not addressed an important country like Syria in his speech, and why he was asking the Arabs to pay for the

Europeans' holocaust against the Jews.

18. (U) Answering questions and offering commentary to groups of interventions at a time, Ambassador took the opportunity at the event to emphasize the President's key themes. He also urged audience members to view the speech as a "declaration of intent" meant to present the President's strategic direction, from which would then flow planning and programs to implement that vision.

19. (U) Coverage of the event in Arabic-language dailies "Al Arab" and "Al Watan" was positive, featuring photos and noting, for example, that "Speaking in Arabic, LeBaron stressed what President Obama said, 'America was not and will not be at war with Islam.'"

LEBARON